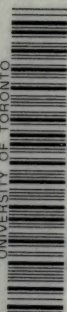


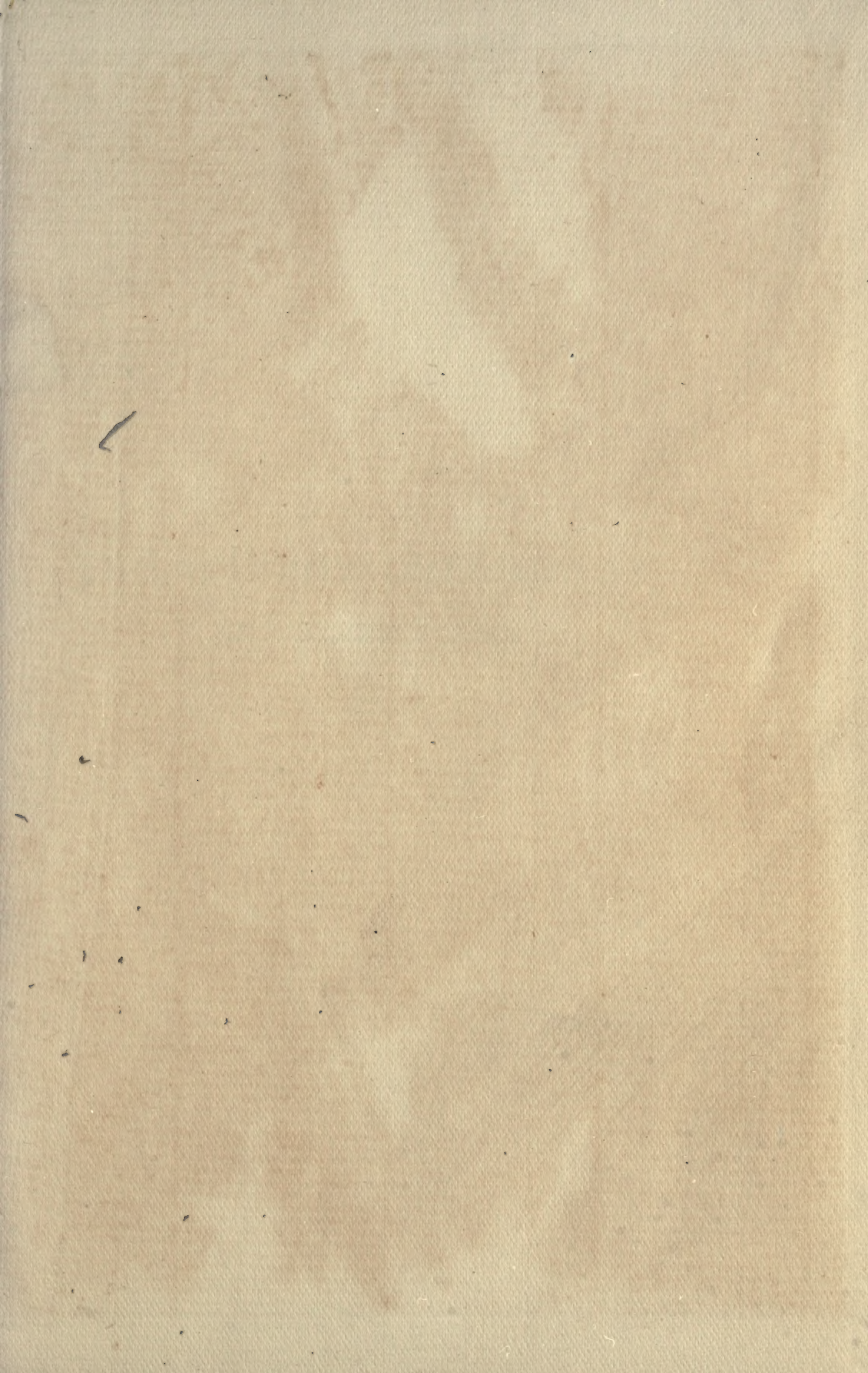
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THE QUEEN'S CHRONICLER
AND OTHER POEMS

By the Same Author.

MEMORIALS OF AN EIGHTEENTH
CENTURY PORTRAIT PAINTER.

TENNYSON: A CRITICAL STUDY.

HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS IN DONEGAL
AND ANTRIM.

THE REPENTANCE OF A PRIVATE
SECRETARY.

THE DECAY OF SENSIBILITY, AND
OTHER ESSAYS.

The Queen's Chronicler

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

STEPHEN GWYNN

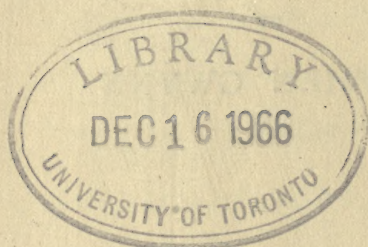
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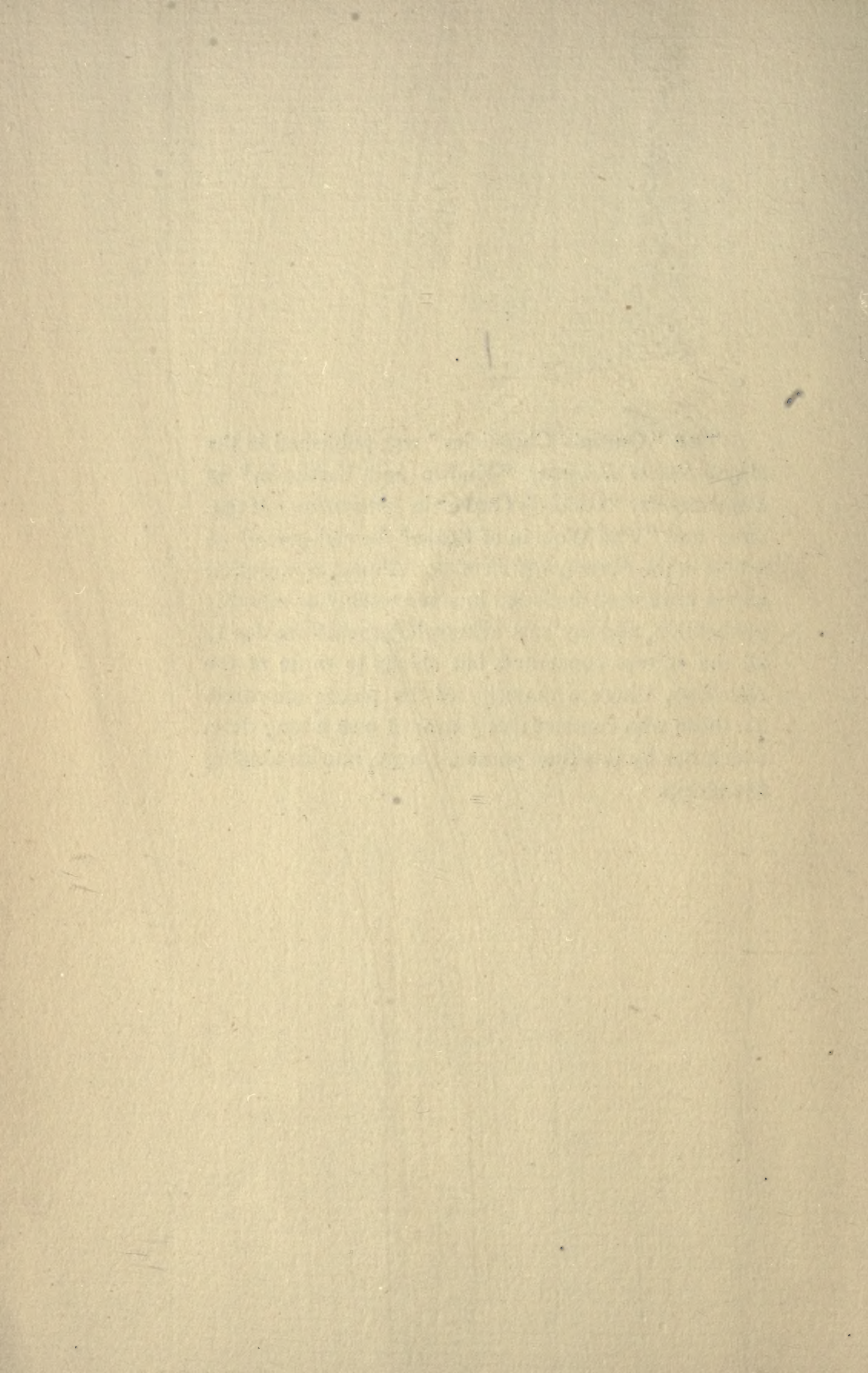
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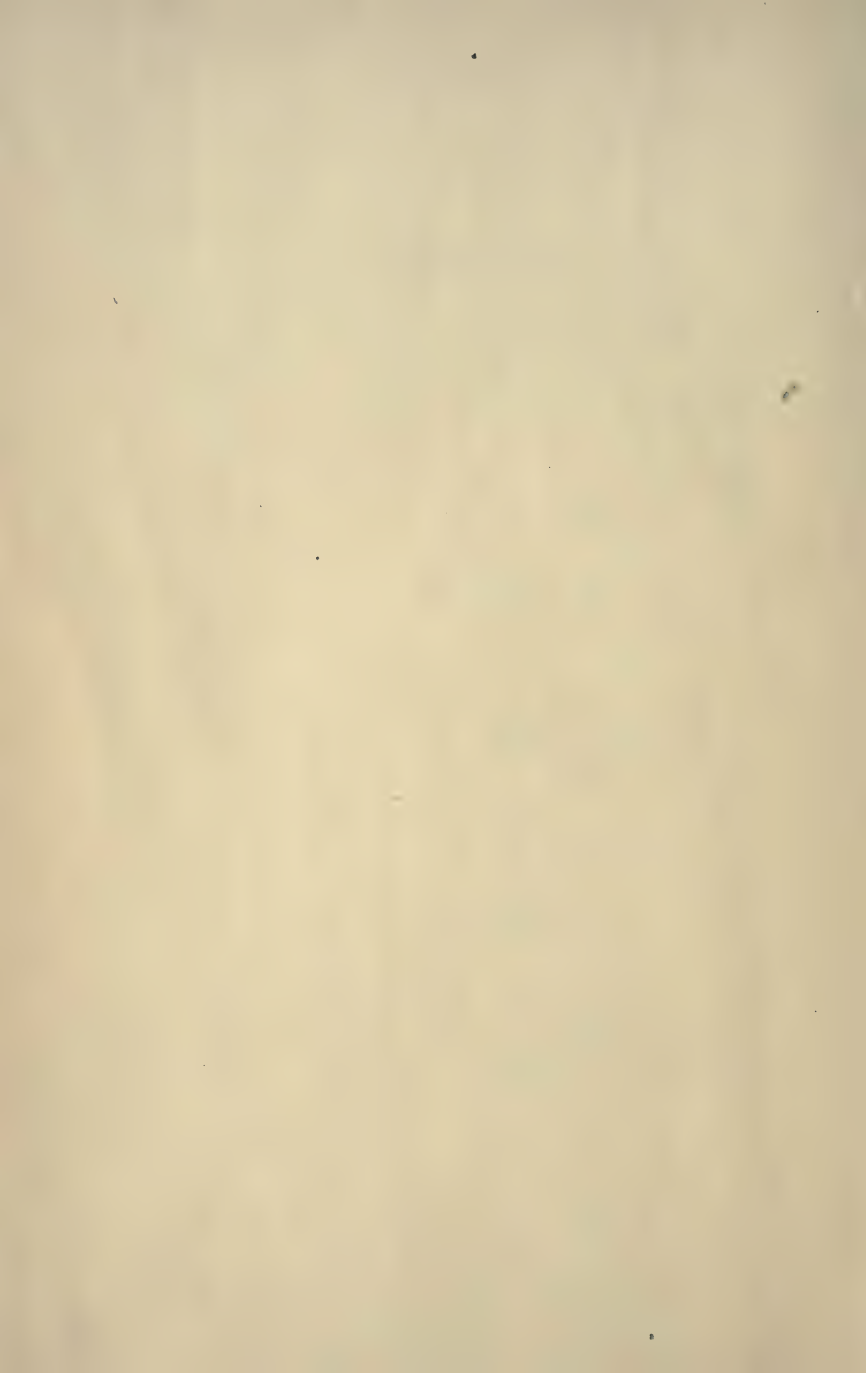
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THE QUEEN'S CHRONICLER

I HAVE a weakness—every one confesses

To some such small delinquency as this—
For old Brantôme, although the world professes

To find him shocking—and, indeed, he is:
But, after all, the work which so distresses

Our moral age was not so bad in his:
He dedicates it to a dear dead duke,
And may have thought it quite beyond rebuke.

Besides, he wrote two books, and one of them

Treats of great queens or ladies of the court,

A volume no archbishop need condemn :

And if at times these ladies took their sport,
The chronicler, with his discreet "Ahem!"

Glosses the matter. Were they not, in short,
Suns of the world? 'Twould never do for one
Mere mortal to monopolise the sun.

His very fairest fair, his saint of saints,
Is hapless Mary Stuart, loveliest
Of all the queens that truth or fancy paints,
And, Brantôme gives his word, among the best.
In France he saw her happy ; her complaints
He heard in bitter Scotland. Like the rest,
He worshipped, being a man : sat down to write,
And leaves her character one spotless white.

How she was born to greatness, and how bred
In loveliness, he tells ; how graced in arts ;
How many a wise and witty thing she said,
Capped verse with Ronsard and displayed rare
parts

In Latin speeches: then, how she was wed,
And, more than Queen of France, was Queen
of hearts:

Yet Queen of France she was for two bright
years,

Dismally ended with a widow's tears.

But her white beauty in her solemn weeds,
As royal fashion was, of purest white,
Wore the dim radiance that all else exceeds,
Like a June lily in the moon's pale light.

'Twas the pathetic loveliness that pleads,
Rather than claims our homage as a right,
When she, sweet derelict, for good or ill,
Set out to voyage at the tempest's will.

Rough Scotland summoned her; and, truly, fain
She was to put her queenship clean away
And be content with but her dower, Touraine.
Yet the harsh regents urged: she might not
stay.

So with great company and gilded train
 (For all the Court convoyed her on her way)
She came to Calais: spent there, Brantôme tells,
A week in the sad ritual of farewells.

Then she perforce embarked; but ere the galleys
 Had left the port, another ship set sail,
Struck on a rock not half a league from Calais,
 And Mary's self heard drowning sailors wail,
Yet might have been at Paris in her palace
 For all that speediest succour could avail:
A strange dark omen, that she was not slow
So to interpret, being loath to go.

Yet forth they fared, and soon a fair wind blew:
 Chained galley slaves had rest: but she, poor
 Queen,
Stood on the poop and watched while fainter grew
 The shore where all her happiness had been:
And still her cry was "Adieu, France, adieu,"
 Till night drew on and nothing could be seen.

—All this we all have read in song and ballad ;
But, Brantôme adds, she only ate a salad.

(His small familiar touches are delightful,
Making one see)—She lay on deck all night,
Awaiting dawn : and fate was not so spiteful
But that with morning France was still in sight
And she herself had bid the watch at nightfall
To rouse her, fearing nothing, with the light.
So for a few sad hours she found relief
In iteration of an exile's grief,

Till France was lost. Then she began to pray
For English ships to drive them back perforce ;
But the wind bore her northward, and the gray
Sea fog encompassed them ; they heard the
hoarse
Surf on a stony coast, and groped their way
Till Leith was near and beacons marked their
course.

But Chastellard leaps up on deck and cries,
"Light us no lamps: we have our lady's eyes."

Poor gallant poet-madman!—Little show
Of gallantry received them at the port,
And Mary wept aloud to see the row
Of sorry hackneys trapped in sorry sort:
How far unlike the glitter and the glow,
The pomp and pageantry of France's Court!
And when she reached her house of Holyrood
The welcome boded little joy or good.

For from the very first a certain friction
Declared itself—one might have said a strife:
Her almoner gave a rash benediction
To Protestants; they all but took his life
In Mary's presence: no obscure prediction
Of Rizzio shrieking and the bloody knife.
And when the frightened queen withdrew, a
number
Of bagpipes skirled, to lull her into slumber.

Yet all the sunshine was not left in France,
And Scotland, too, had hearts that could take
fire,

As what heart would not? for a single glance
Of eyes that seemed the very world's desire.
And Brantôme tells us how she led the dance,
And when she donned their barbarous attire
(Meaning by that, no doubt, the Highland
plaid)

What a bewitching Highland lass she made !

Indeed, such details make the staple stuff
Of all his chronicle: he tells us little
Of Knox's preachments, Murray's plots and
rough

Hard-fisted politics: repeats no tittle
Of all the scandal, though 'twas rife enough.
As to her plotting Darnley's death, poor wittol,
He scorns the charge: hers was no cruel nature,
And Bothwell was a rude displeasing creature.

Alas ! her subjects were not all so nice
And charitable. They imprisoned her,
But gaolers too had hearts that were not ice :
So she escaped and made a mighty stir,
Levied a gallant army in a trice
And headed it like any valiant sir.
But when Lord Murray took the field to meet
her,
Alack ! the gallant army grew discreeter.

They left her basely.—So began the long
Captivity : the years grew to nineteen.
The captive plotted, which, no doubt, was wrong :
So in the twentieth came the closing scene.
She died, we learn, for reasons good and strong :
At any rate, she died as should a queen.
Her gentlewomen told the tale ; its thrill
Of pity quickens Brantôme's pages still.

For, when the Lords Commissioners appeared
In that gray prison-house at Fotheringay,

She welcomed them, nor seemed as one who
feared,

Not loath to hear what they were loath to say :
But told them, slow captivity endeared

Relief that came to her in any way.

Only, she craved their courtesy to accord her
The needful space to set her house in order.

But Shrewsbury checked her roughly: "Madam,
no,

To-morrow morning between seven and eight,
Be ready !" Paulet bade her undergo

Her doom with fortitude. She answered straight
She thanked him ; but she needed none to show

The way in which a queen should bear her
fate.

Still, since the end was urgent, that at least
She asked for the attendance of her priest.

It was denied her. Well (we all can quote
Lucan), the gods are on the side that wins.

But once theology is well afloat

On a floodtide, the devil surely grins.

At all events, Mary sat down and wrote

For general absolution of her sins.

It is, perhaps, the best way before dying:

Details are never quite so edifying.

This duty done, she set herself to make

Pathetic little presents to each friend—

“This ring, this kerchief—wear it for my sake—”

Spending in gifts all that she had to spend,

Save one rich velvet: “This,” said she, “I take;

I must go somewhat fine to meet my end.”

Tranquil and kind, consoling those that wept,

She moved among them; then withdrew and
slept.

Yet rose ere dawn and robed her and prayed long,

Long, long, and passionately. Then she drew

Close to the flickering fire where in a throng

Huddled her womenfolk, pale, faint, and few;

And spoke and cheered them, bidding them be
strong

Against the work that there was yet to do :
For they must witness all and how she bore
The worst.—Then came a rough knock at the
door.

Black-robed she rose, and in her hand she took
A little ivory crucifix. The sight
Made those that entered pause and stand to look,
For colour mounted in her cheek so bright
That all the years away that moment shook
And left her young as on her bridal night.
Then, ere they spoke, she said, distinct and slow :
“Gentlemen, I am ready. Let us go.”

And never, Brantôme writes, to any ball
With a more courtly or more winning grace
Moved she than when she swept into the hall
Before the gazers crowded in their place ;

Nor could the hideous scaffold there appal
The courage that was radiant in her face.
'Twas draped in common crape, meagre and
mean
As though she died a felon, not a queen.

Scant courtesy had she of them. As she spoke
Tranquilly there, commending to the nation
Her son, beseeching kindness for her folk,
And for herself to God made supplication,
A Protestant divine in on her broke,
Pestered her with contentious exhortation,
Railed at her crucifix, would not let her pray,
Even at the block, to God in her own way.

Yet all this rudeness had no power to wreck
Her patient dignity, and even the cry
Wrung from her women she was prompt to check
With finger laid on lip and warning eye.
Then they came near to help her bare her neck
And decently apparel her to die,

But the rough headsman tore away her vest
And stripped to all the marvel of her breast :

Yet asked her pardon ; and her voice was heard
In gentle answer with unlabouring breath.
And then her eyes were bandaged ; her last word
Was "Lord, into Thy hands"—and then
came death.

Blow fell on blow and blow, till at the third
The headsman cried, "God save Elizabeth!"
Then lifted up the head and in men's sight
Tore off the coif, to show the hair was white.

O envious heart of woman ! Though she gain
A thousand triumphs in a thousand ways,
Yet in her inmost soul she most is fain
For woman's worship and for woman's praise.
Throne, statecraft, victory, all, all, were vain :
She craved for roses 'mid her sombre bays.
Elizabeth was wooed for power or place ;
But men had died to look on Mary's face.

Why else was there poured out that brimming
vial

Of malice?—Grant that it was wise to smirch
Her name with charges unapproved by trial,
Yet why withhold the priest? why that
research

For ignominy? why the last denial
Even of burial by her mother Church?
I cannot pardon to the great Queen Bess
This paltry posthumous vindictiveness.

Well, there they stand, pursuer and pursued,
Famous alike now by the common voice.
One is the bad, no doubt, and one the good:
In one the gods, in one the devils, rejoice.
One has been canonised by Mr. Froude,
The other by old Brantôme: take your
choice.

Say, for the name that each has after death,
Would you be Mary or Elizabeth?

One stands revealed to our astounded eyes

The strangest figure seen on any stage :

No reek of adulation can disguise

That nightmare harridan, ignoring age,

Grotesquely pushing death aside with cries

Of her fierce will's indomitable rage :

With power to the last moment unabated

And to the last, served, courted, worshipped,
hated.

The other overawes the noise of shame,

Silences it with music of her choir,

Too fair for judgment, too adored for blame,

Like Helen glorious from the Trojan fire :

Her face is in all hearts, about her name

Whispers the sighing voice of all desire.

—O ageless beauty, O immortal youth,

I think old Brantôme merely spoke the truth.

IRELAND

IRELAND, oh Ireland! centre of my longings,
Country of my fathers, home of my heart!
Overseas you call me: *Why an exile from me?*
Wherefore sea-severed, long leagues apart?

As the shining salmon, homeless in the sea depths,
Hears the river call him, scents out the land,
Leaps and rejoices in the meeting of the waters,
Breasts weir and torrent, nests him in the sand;

Lives there and loves; yet with the year's re-
turning,
Rusting in the river, pines for the sea,
Sweeps back again to the ripple of the tide way,
Roamer of the waters, vagabond and free.

Wanderer am I like the salmon of the rivers ;
London is my ocean, murmurous and deep,
Tossing and vast ; yet through the roar of London
Comes to me thy summons, calls me in sleep.

Pearly are the skies in the country of my fathers,
Purple are thy mountains, home of my heart.
Mother of my yearning, love of all my longings,
Keep me in remembrance, long leagues apart.

OUT IN THE DARK

OH, up the brae, and up and up, beyont the
fairy thorn,

It's there they hae my baby laid, that died when
he was born.

Afore the priest could christen him to save his
soul, he died;

"It never lived at all," they said.—'Twas livin'
in my side.

For many a day an' many a night, an' weary
night and day,

I kent him livin' at my heart, I carena what
they say.

For many a day an' many a night I wearied o'
unrest,

But now I'm sore to hae my wean back hidden
in my breast.

He'll sure be thinkin' long for me, an' wearyin'
his lone

Up in thon corner by the whins wi' neither cross
nor stone;

Ay, tho' I'd died wi' him itself, they wouldna
let us be—

The corner o' a field for him, the holy ground
for me.

Thare many a wean that lies wi' him, and none
that got a name,

Thare many a wife, hard put till it, was glad
that dead they came,

Ay, many a man that scarcely minds a child o'
his lies there;

But och! 'tis cruel hard to quit the first you'd
ever bear.

The graves are all that tiny that they'd hardly
raise a mound,

And couples o' a Sunday do be coortin' on thon
ground,

An' thare none that thinks upon them ; but my
heart'll be there still,

On the sod among the bracken an' the whins
upon the hill.

I'd be feared to come o' night there, for the hill
is fairy ground :

But thare maybe more nor fairies dancin' in the
fairy round—

Och, an' if I only thought it ! sure I'd let them
do their worst,

An' I'd go to see my baby, tho' I be to be
accursed.

But I'll never reach my wean now, neither here
nor in the sod,

An' I'm better wi' the Christians an' the souls
that's saved for God ;—

Och, to feel his fingers on me, an' to clasp him
when he smiled !

Sure ye'd think there'd be one heaven for the
mother an' the child.

MATER SEVERA

WHERE the huge Atlantic swings heavy water
eastward,

Ireland, square to meet it, shoulders off the seas ;
Wild are all her coasts with war of cliff and
billow,

On her northern moorland is little sheltered
ease.

Well is with the salmon, ranger of her rivers ;

Well is with the mackerel shoaling in each
bay,

Dear is all the land to the lonely snipe and
curlew ;

Ay, but for its manfolk ; a bitter lot have
they.

Thankless is the soil: men trench, and delve,
and labour,

Black and heartless peat amid barren knowes
of stone:

Then to win a living overseas they travel,
And their women gather, if God pleases, what
was sown.

Harvesters a-homing from the golden tilth of
England,

Where they sweat to cope with increase of
teeming years,

Find too oft returning, sick with others' plenty,
Sunless autumn dank upon green and spindling
ears.

Or a tainted south wind brings upon the root-
crop

Stench of rotting fibre and green leaf turning
black:

Famine, never distant, stalks nearer now and
nearer,
Bids them rake like crows amid mussel-beds
and wrack.

Bleak and grey to man is the countenance of
Nature ;
Bleak her soil below him, bleak her sky above ;
Wherefore, then, by man is her rare smile so
cherished ?
Paid her niggard bounty with so lavish love ?

Not the slopes of Rhine with such yearning are
remembered ;
Not your Kentish orchards, not your Devon
lanes.
'Tis as though her sons for that ungentle mother
Knew a mother's tenderness, felt a mother's
pains.

Many an outward-bound, as the ship heads under
Tory,
Clings with anguished eyes to the barren
Fanad shore.

Many a homeward-bound, as they lift the frown-
ing Foreland,
Pants to leap the leagues to his desolate
Gweedore.

There about the ways God's air is free and
spacious ;
Warm are chimney-corners there, warm the
kindly heart :
There the soul of man takes root, and through
its travail
Grips the rocky anchorage till the life-strings
part,

THE ASH WALK

A POINTED arch in the grey wall
Leads where the slanting sunbeams fall
On the white path of river sand,
And, ranged in rank, great ash trees stand.
Not theirs the oak's round massive lines,
Nor measured symmetry of pines ;
Each, vast yet limber, in his place
Grows with an undictated grace.
High soars the feathery cloud of green,
Light, fluttering, touched with wavering sheen,
And rifted, where the sky shows through
In jewelled fretwork, lucent blue.

See how, like conscious creatures, they
Breathe in the blue soft Irish day,

And the delighted air receives
The lovely answer of their leaves,
To the soft wind among them playing,
In ceaseless gentle motion swaying:
As when a woman fond and fair
Feels on her wealth of loose-piled hair
Her lover's hand, and, sweetly bent,
Whispers a sigh of mere content,
While faint and happy motions flow
Across her face and come and go;
So in the swaying boughs you guess
The gentle stir of happiness.

Such in their stateliness are these,
Born very nobles of the trees.
No strugglers, scant of light and air,
But fenced and favoured all with care,
And rooted where to heart's desire
Kindly the air and soil conspire.

Bounteous in beauty there they stand,
Bounteous in shelter to the land,
By their mere breathing making sweet
The air to creatures at their feet;
Fulfilling all their purpose meant
With glory and with ornament.

O perishable splendour, fraught
With mortal sadness to my thought!
Look what a tide of sap there heaves
In yonder sapling toward the leaves
With rustling seedpods laden down;
And then—behold yon barren crown.
For of the band one giant there
Stands in the noon of summer bare.
No need to wait the wintry blast:
Leaf-time and fruitage long are past:
The naked boughs but last to show
How one has gone, how all must go.

And when sad ebbing of the sap
Wrecks that brave phalanx, gap by gap,
Alas ! what rabble shall be found
Crowding upon the vacant ground !

And, as I looked, I was aware
Of other orders passing there,
Of other goodly lives that stand
Stately and spacious in the land,
Of gallant creatures, born to life
Exempt from toil, exempt from strife,
That in this age's bitter mood
Shall scarcely find their stock renewed,
Till some sad morning wakes, and sees
No more such folk, no more such trees.

LOST VISION

IN the forest, among the ruddy pine trunks,
Where the russet footing muffles every tread,
Alleys tempt, and through the ranged assembly
Down never-ending vistas I am led.

My love has her dwelling in the forest,
I can feel her as I walk among the pines ;
All the avenues of the wood lead to her
And my heart runs to her leaping down the
lines.

All about her is a magic circle ;
I can speak with her, can touch her, take her
hand ;

But she smiles, her eyes are kind and tranquil,
And a world divides me from her where I stand.

All the forest-land is haunted with her presence,
In the rustle of the bracken I can hear,
I can hear her in the swaying tree-tops ;
In the dappled dance of shadow she is near.

For her sake I love the columned forest
Where the ways for ever meet, for ever part ;
But I dread that I have lost my way for ever
To the green and sunny glade that is her heart.

Ah but, love, some day and for a moment
Break the circle ; in the sunshine let me lie,
See again the eyes divinely altered,
Let me see you once again before I die.

IN THE CHURCHYARD

THE plumed black horses pacing go
In formal hideous pomp of woe.

Lo, this man's mother there;
So must my mother fare.

Rough hireling hands, that have not known
Her living, lift the coffin down,
And ranged on either hand,
Strangers and kin, we stand.

They there, we here, and she between.
So near me, I could almost lean
And touch her bed; yet thus
Remote how far from us!

All changed, all passing—save her hair :
Death sets no sign of lordship there.
Years frosted it before,
Now it shall change no more.

Why not have given her to kind Earth
That from her daisies might have birth,
That she into the grass
After her kind might pass ?

That cold, unsightly, pitiless box
Never again unseals, unlocks.
How close clamped edges fit !
Vain to press lips on it.

Hark ! the first clay in handfuls thrown,
And then the reader's monotone :
Out under heaven here
It scarce arrests the ear.

It stops. With dreadful instant speed
Men fall to work, as if indeed
There were a life to save
By filling up a grave.

O set grey eyes of men she bore,
Watching the trench fill more and more !
Set eyes—no tear is shed ;
A strong race she has bred.

Still shovelling, shovelling on the dead ;
And then, one stroke with back of spade
To show that all is done,
Wage earned and resting won.

Kind hands range flowers on the loose clay,
Poor pretty hothouse blossoms they,
Tarnished already ; Death
Has touched them with his breath.

Is there no more, no more to do?
No more, no more; she has her due.
 Leave her, come home again;
 'Tis cold here in the rain.

Leave her to Nature; so 'tis best,
In that blind bosom lost, to rest.
 Her separate life is done,
 With Nature she is one.

Where Nature strikes the scar will close,
And soon the sod together grows.
 Her balm is Lethe; yet
 We for remembrance fret,

And, as each breath men dying draw
Rebels against the falling law,
 And with a kind of rage
 Heaves up its bony cage,

So strive we, when on Death we think,
Not into nothingness to sink.

Ah! if none soothe us, still
Nature is kind : Death will.

KNOWN AND UNKNOWN

"Le soleil ni la mort ne se peut regarder fixement."

O HIGH-ASPIRING soul of man that reaches
Beyond the utmost vistas of the stars !
O frail and flinching sense that mars
The effect begun, and thwarts what wisdom
teaches !

Man's mind has weighed the overwhelming Sun,
Conned and mapped out his race,
Perused the records flaming on his face,
And summed the courses he has left to run.
His very elements are thrown
Into man's crucible and known,—
Yet can our eyes abide
His noonday pride?

Known are the chemic laws
How, from what studied cause,
This mortal body must
Resolve itself to dust :
Yet lurks in silence of the tomb
Utter and fathomless intensity of gloom,
For, as in the Sun's face
Nothing is brighter or less bright,
But all one dazzling space
Of indistinguishable light,
So in all other dark
The accustomed sense some difference may mark;
But when we look on Death,
Albeit we strive with knowledge to control
Our tremors, and to heed what wisdom saith,
And bid our sense take comfort from our soul,
Yet Death's impenetrable black disguise
Dazzles our eyes :
And so each human generation stands,
Into the darkness stretching suppliant hands,

Behind that noontide splendour of the sun,
Athwart that luminous haze,
Could our abashèd gaze
Pierce, and a way be won,
A path for vision free,
What should our senses see?

An insupportable furnace, a soil burnt out and
charred,
A ball of lava half molten, a riven and fiery shard,
Pitted with clefts and chasms, and every pithole
filled
With sulphurous flaming gases, its remnant of
sap distilled,
Distilled and for ever distilling, and fiercely
whirled through space,
Whirling, whirling, and whirling in mad and
meaningless race;
Parched and shrivelled and splitting, and doomed
to a day foretold,

When even the fiery life of the brute insensate
thing

Must flame and flicker away and sink to a torpid
cold,

And one more star shall shoot from its æon-
travelled ring.

Thus, ere men learnt the starry runes to
spell,

Had mortal minds prefigured hell.

O bland, O wonder-working Sun!

Is this truth told of you?

Who in your splendour draw the dew

Through the soft night to fall

And crown your work begun,

O friend of all!

Ay, of the poorest cripple whose worn thatch

Gapes in the winter to the wind and rain:

Huddled he crouches by cold hearth to catch

Faint animation, till you come again.

Food, clothing, shelter, none are for his uses
Save such as very need almost refuses.
Love knows him not, and hardly Pity lingers.
To gather fire and chafe his perished fingers.
Reckon his all, and when the reckoning's done
Nothing he has, save only you, O Sun !
But when once more your bounty is bestowed,
He limps some score of paces down the road ;
Tottering upon stiff knees and twisted toes,
And shaken with the palsy, forth he goes
And sits him down, and lets the summer shine
Visit his blood like wine ;
Numb joints relax and frozen joys revive,
And for a little while 'tis good to be alive.

O Sun we live by and we love !
If you be but a hell above,
Then, Death we die by and we fear,
What were you, seen more near ?

Slow surges in from unknown oceans wide
Life, like a tide.

In sweeps the eternal element, strong and fresh ;
Faint felt at first, it gathers weight and force,
And backward hurls within the dykes of flesh
Another torrent of opposing course.

Then the flood knows its limit and grows slack,
While that stemmed current, sluggish, sickly,
and chill,

Downward and downward pouring, beats Life
back.

Then the tide turns, and all is borne away
On the resistless torrent of decay.

But those two forces, ere the ebb begins,
Before Life yields and Dissolution wins,
Hang, for the drawing of a single breath,
In sullen equipoise—and that is Death.

So frame the wise their answer. Death ? the pause
Ordained by Nature's laws

In her unending strife,
Eternal interchange of life and life :
Yet till the human eye
Unflinching learn to face the Sun on high,
So long before Death's darkling veil
Must human senses quail.

"Slay if thou wilt, but slay me in the light!"
O cry of Ajax for the cheering Sun!
Yet of this common heritage, sun-right,
There are who, reft and utterly undone,
In pestilent alleys where the fever crawls,
Are hived like vermin among rotting walls.
What do *they* know of sunshine? what their share
In that impartial largess? Overhead
Hang murky wrappings of grime laden air,
Changing the sun to brass, the sky to lead.
Hopeless, resourceless, sunless even, they own
One earthly help alone.
Some sink to brutishness, but Death is kind

And hides them up for ever out of mind ;
Some chafe and pine, whom Death at last sets
free ;

Some toil until Death ends their misery.

O, more impartial than the very Sun,

By none desired, Death is denied to none.

All dread his coming, yet as he draws near

All cease to fear.

O Death ! for at the least a moment's rest

They sink upon thy breast :

What cometh next they know not ; yet, per-
chance,

In some expiring trance,

To eyes from dizziness of sense set free

Shines through the face they most desired to see.

A DEATH MASK

THAT cast there, fixed against the wall—
That face, seen now the lamps are lit—
What cunning sculptor moulded it?

O, sir—the cunningest of all,

You know the Morgue. An artist there,
Passing as one might pass oneself,
Saw lying on that marble shelf
The face you see, and found it fair,
It was a little thing to ask,
Leave to draw off a plaster mask
And save the beauty. Now you meet
Hawkers that sell it in the street.

Pitiful, sure enough—yet she,
Could she behold, need scarcely blame
A traffic that does her no shame.
Death takes of her new dignity.
That face, so resolute and brave,
Comes undefeated from the wave.

O brave kind face, you feared no stain,
Nor smothered life yet due to birth,
But having tried and judged the earth.
Leapt out and left it in disdain.

That strange, set smile ! A duellist,
From whose faint hand the weapon slips,
Might wear such curved, unflinching lips.
—What were they like once when they kissed ?

Look at her hair, drawn back in bands,
Across the ears that hardly show ;
One loved it when she wore it so,
Just so unruffled, till his hands——

Ah, but not dank, not dull ! It shone,
It lived ; and here it falls like lead,
Yet keeps the contour of the head
His fingers loved to dwell upon.

Ay, what of him ? Read in her face.
Is it betrayal that you trace ?
That unresentful brow, exempt
From soil of anger or contempt,
Seems only touched with some divine
Compassion for a faith less fine.

What of him, then ?—of him who failed,
Of him who faltered, him who quailed ?
Dwells he, with scarce one thought his own,
In easeless crowded wealth alone ?
Dreams he, when all life's pulsing bloom
Hardens to gold beneath his touch,
Of how so little meant so much,
Once in that bare and happy room ?

And what of her, so kind, so fair?
Does she still know? Does she still care?

Those baffling eyes!—Behind each lid,
Each drawn-down lid, the soul shines through,
And you can tell that they were blue,—
And yet what message hold they hid?
Dumb eyes! But he that saw them turn,
How deep! how soft! and melt and yearn
In utter love upon him bent,
Never saw them so eloquent.

Who shall divine? But if her leap
To other lands than lands of sleep
Launch her, and he may follow, where
He can confess till his life lies
Pierced through and thrilling with her eyes,
He yet may be forgiven there.

ON READING 'WEIR OF
HERMISTON'

AH! when word came piercing the ocean, leap-
ing under the high-heaped main,
Scarce at first would we credit the message:
what, was exile itself in vain?

What, had the winds, strong winged with healing,
wafted away the gift they bore?
Hears he no more the wind-swept tree tops?
hears he no longer ocean's roar?

Sorrow of all for a glory shattered; sorrow of
many he helped in need;
Gone the maker and gone the thinker; gone the
knightly in word and deed—

Sorrow of craftsmen all the world over, word-
craft wailing a lamp grown dim:
Masters of craft they might be to others; none
but was learning the craft from him.

Far from sorrow his mountain sepulchre, worthily
chosen and won of right;
Arduous struggle and slowfoot scaling; rest at
last on a farseen height.

Mourn no more for him—so we sighed it: man
he dies, with his guerdon won;
There he sleeps with his work accomplished:
rest is glory when work is done.

Done—it may be, not all we hoped for; search-
ings there were of discontent:
Much he gave, yet withheld he nothing? much
he uttered, yet more was meant.

58 ON READING 'WEIR OF HERMISTON'

Silver he gave us; aye, with chasing, cunningly
fashioned, joy to behold;

Praise be the artist's—not the metal's—who
wrought till silver was more than gold.

Yet we murmured: O cunning in silver, great is
your gift; we are fain for more.

Mine in your heart, dig deeper, deeper; surely
there lurks in it richer ore.

Man you show us, with wild blood driven; man
that gustiest passion sways:

Man the adventurer, man the warrior, man the
walker in trackless ways.

Man from man with the sword edge severed,
danger dividing friend and foe;

Peril, tumult, and chance uniting travellers, far
from the hearths they know.

What of the stranger spirit-travel? Paint us
the welling springs of life,
Man where manhood has best fulfilment, hearted
and handed, man and wife.

Paint the throbbing of heart-sick passion; paint
us woman, the rose unfurled;
You that have lived and loved and suffered, show
us the ties that link the world.

Write of the world that is here about us; world
where tossing we rise and fall;
You that can sway us with unknown passions,
strike on the chords that are strung for all.

So we chided him, half unwilling; least contented
were staunchest friends:
Sadly we buried our aspiration; Hope was higher,
but here it ends.

60 ON READING 'WEIR OF HERMISTON'

Nay, he died, but the hope was answered; given
a moment and snatched again.

Here at last was the whole man speaking; here
at last was the golden vein.

Strange and thrilling bequest he leaves us, he who
sleeps in his island tomb;

Tragical issues; pages laden heavy with hints of
impending doom.

Son and father so strangely coupled; smouldering
embers, leaping flame.

Duty and manhood wildly clashing, honour
cruelly linked with shame.

Man enfettered, fast bound to others; swaying
here in a netted bond;

Bound to the past and bound to the future,
bound to life and a hope beyond.

Man, no longer alone in action ; here is woman's
 " bewildering face " ;

Loving woman, with love encompassed, love her
 peril and saving grace,

Kirsty the woman, leal in service, human, stately
 in fearless truth,
Scarred in seeming but young in spirit, love in
 her heart making endless youth.

Kirsty the maiden, ripe for courtship, loved and
 loving, and wildly fair,
Sweet with glamour of love and peril ; so we
 see her ; and sudden, there

Lies the word on the poor page, broken, Never
 now shall the tale be told ;
Never the hand that wrought in silver chisel a
 statue of living gold,

62 ON READING 'WEIR OF HERMISTON'

Open at last lay all Art's gateways ; Fate threw
a final bar across.

—Ah ! had it come so little sooner, so had we
never felt our loss.

Nay, for then we had never known him, Faith
had never been justified.

So had his life withheld its lesson, proven for
craftsmen ere he died.

For he attained it : there was the essence ; death
was the blind brute stroke of Fate.

Art rewarded the loyal striver, stinted him not,
though the gift came late.

Men will honour him all the world over, honour
the race that gave him birth :

Fame is his ; but for all Fame's voices none but
craftsmen will know his worth.

ON READING 'WEIR OF HERMISTON' 63

Fame—it is yours, O master of wordcraft: dearer
than fame were, methinks, to you,
Sorrowing tribute of lesser craftsmen, praising
the work that was yet to do.

THE CAPTIVE POLAR BEAR

His dam lay, powerless now to help,
White fur on snow with one red stain;
A sailor caught the snarling whelp,
Who never swam the seas again.

Huge now, he lies behind the bars,
Stretches, and gapes, and idly rolls:
Too soft to face the winds and stars
That freeze above the icy poles.

Mangy and yellow-toothed and old
He lies, and lolls an inky tongue;
Yet in his brain's most inward fold
Still lives the world where he was young.

For still he keeps the sharp fish-head,
The sloping shoulder, the round limbs,
To cleave the water, for the dread
Of all that by the icefield swims.

Still upon keen, clear frosty days
There comes a stirring in his blood,
Inklings of his forefathers' ways,
Of prey and battle in the flood.

He scents the blood of what they slew,
He dreams, what he can never feel,
How the snatched salmon quivers through,
And how they tore the oily seal.

Forward and backward, like the tide,
With ceaseless motion shambling slow,
He sways himself from side to side,
As if he rode the rocking floe.

Or in his tank—how cramped and small
After wide waters of the pole !
Contemptuously from wall to wall
He surges with great wallowing roll.

He loves no keeper's hand ; cold rage
Haunts him for ever in his cell ;
Thus far he keeps his heritage,
Tameless and unapproachable.

GIFFORD'S GRAVE.*

(A STORY OF SIR GEORGE NAPIER.)

MANY a hero, born and bred
By Irish waters, has worn the red,
Many a soldier wise and good;
But never was bred a nobler brood
Than grew in times of a troubled state
Amid the anguish of 'Ninety-eight,
And wore the blazon *Without a stain*—
The eagle-featured Napier strain.

*See *Life of General Sir Charles Napier*, i., 162, and *Early Military Life of Sir George Napier*, p. 156. George Napier was at this time a captain in the 52nd, and his brother William a captain in the 43rd, the two regiments forming with the 95th Crawford's famous Light Division. Both brothers were wounded in this engagement.

Wide as the world they spread their praise,
Heroes three in heroic days;
Three names written in living gold;—
This is a deed of the second told.

To Torres Vedras in evil hour
Massena led Napoleon's power:
Baffled and beaten, back again
Turned the invading host to Spain,
And through the lands that their rapine wronged,
Fierce pursuers, the British thronged,
Fierce pursuers; yet on the trail
Of such a quarry might hunters quail;
The rearguard, veterans led by Ney,
At Casal Nova were held to bay.

Napier had seen a brother borne
Back for dead from the field that morn,
Brother dearer than life or limb,
Not than the friend who fought by him;

For at his side was Gifford,—one
Brave as a Napier, that had done
Things surpassing belief that day,
Leading his men in the bitter fray
Over hillock and wall and trench:
Kill that officer! cried the French.

The fight had joined with the rising sun;
By noon the powder was almost done.
Napier was bidding his men retire
To come again with a fiercer fire,
And called to Gifford, who, farther still
Stood to the front on the vine-clad hill.
Gifford turned; and from ambush close
Unseen behind him Frenchmen rose.
Help there was none; a crash, a flare,
A cry; and Gifford was lying there.
And out of the bushes, where they crept
Hidden, four of the enemy leapt,
Leapt, and swift on the spoil they ran
Bending to strip the fallen man.

Napier looked: they were four to one,
His friend lay dead, and the harm was done;
But while his body held living breath
That friend should suffer no shame in death.
He asked no aid, and he spoke no word,
But charged the foe with his single sword;
He scared the vultures, and steel met steel,
And, one to many, he made them reel.
Two of his men had seen, and back
Followed swift on their captain's track.
Vengeance was done; they raised their dead,
Tenderly raised the shattered head.
Napier could hear the bullets fly,
But he lifted the body fair and high,
And bore the dead, death screaming round,
To where his company held their ground.

Rough they were from the battle-time,
Their mouths were black with the cartridge-
grime,

Bloody and black their hands ; each eye
Lit with the light that sees men die ;
Rough-looking, rough-worded ; and yet they knew
To give to a hero's heart its due.
For they gathered and swore no kite should tear
The man they honoured, but even there
He should have burial fit and fair.

For him they did what of him alone
In history's golden page is shown.
There they paused, with the storm of war
Raging about them near and far ;
There, in the front where he fought so well,
There they buried him where he fell.
Hard was the sod ; red bayonet blades
Were fitted ill for the work of spades ;
Shallow the trench was dug ; but deep,
Deep in their hearts his name they keep.
No prayer was said, and no bell rang,
And nothing there but the bullets sang.

But as they levelled the latest sod
Three cheers commended his soul to God.
Silently then they formed, nor stirred
Till they fired a volley at Napier's word;
A man would have thought they were on parade
Who saw not the gaps their volley made.

The brave to the brave had done their rite,
And Napier led them again to the fight;
The bayonets, drouhty with soil and dust,
Drank deep and deeper at every thrust.
Forward they surged; they fought to kill,
Cleared the copses and swept the hill;
Dearly by nightfall their debt was paid,
When far in the front their camp was made;
And in the wake of that fiery wave
Lone in its glory lay Gifford's Grave.

THE CZAR'S ALLY

[The Czar, on his way to Livadia, stopped at the railway station of Tula, and sent a request that Count Tolstoi would come to meet him. The greeting and conversation passed as described below.]

THE White Czar looked across the world and saw
A tax-wrung Europe sweat in barren toil,
And each great power built up of petty griefs,
And his the greatest. So a thought arose,—
“I am the master: surely there is help.”
The White Czar sent a message to the Courts,
And from the Courts a courtly answer came:
The White Czar sent his message to the world,
And from the world a sullen laughter came.
The White Czar called his servants, and he said:

“What help?” They answered, “Lord, there
is no help;
You are the master. Spend, and we are safe.”

The White Czar pondered. “Lo!” he cried,
“a help!”

And southward sped along the iron way,
Built to bear armies. In his course he stayed,
And sent to one, no summons but a prayer.
He came, the peaceful rebel, chief of those
Who, taught to suffer, will not learn to slay,
He, the strange saint, the new Augustin, came:
All peasant in his garb, rough, sheepskin-clad,
And on his breast a wilderness of beard,
Yet noble: and he stood before the Czar.
Then on his shoulders the White Czar laid hands,
Kissed him on cheek and mouth, and spoke his
word.

“You heard my message. Is there any help?
What peace for Europe?” And the other said:

“Lord, you are master ; bid your power disband.”
The White Czar’s eyes before that level gaze
Dropped, and his voice : “I am not master here.
You are a name in Europe. Speak of peace.”
The other answered : “Lord, it shall be done.”

And so they passed, crowned dreamer and
uncrowned,
One to his hearth, there free at his own will
To live, love, suffer—free at least to dream ;
The other guarded, fenced about with awe,
Lord of the swarming legions at whose word
All Europe quivers, Asia shakes, and he
To the Far East lays pathways for his might ;
And bids the sea be furrowed with new deaths,
Strong to lay burdens on the groaning Earth.

O strengthless Might ! O impotence of Power.

THY HEROES, FRANCE—

1899

THY heroes, France, forsake thee not ; they
stand,

Few braving many, in a hostile land.

Thy soldier—who, commanded to be still,

To acquiesce in the established ill,

In righteous pity and in righteous wrath

Strode boldly on his persecuted path,

For tracking guilt, himself the sentence bore,

Thy martyr, France, thy soldier now no more :

Thy famous penman, who in the world's ear

Rang accusation none could choose but hear :

Thy lawyer, whom the assassin's bullet stung,

Loosed like an asp to still that eager tongue,

Who from the hard street, where unhelped he lay,

Limped unaffrighted to renew the fray :

And he, thy scapegoat, long immured from sight,
 His name a mere flag tossing in the fight,
 Who at the last won for thee, thankless France,
 A crowning glory of strong sufferance;
 For thee,—since all are thine, thine at thy need,
 Jew or Alsatian, of thy glorious breed;
 And, honouring these, in them we honour thee,
 And would see France what these would have
 her be,
 Humbled and not humiliated, raised
 Out of the slough where cowards roll disgraced,
 Cleansed—as by fire if needs be—young and new,
 To her great self, as are her heroes true.

THE ROYAL HOUSE OF FRANCE

“KINGS and the seed of kings,” they sit
From royal charge exempt.
Yet earn in many a restless fit
Their tribute of contempt.

Rich, lettered, leisured, in their band
No strenuous soul is known.
They hint their mission, hat in hand,
Mendicants for a throne.

Merchants of hate, their game they play
With counterfeiting face;
The blood of old Egalité
Still rankles in the race—

Like him, they hail the general wrack,
Like him no sword they draw,
But tempt a frantic folk to sack
The citadel of law.

One kissed in court the branded cheat
—O brave bid for a crown!
With justice trampled in the street
He flung their lilies down.

Not theirs the path of France to shape,
To speak her mind aloud,
Who coldly in their wisdom ape
The madness of a crowd.

Whatever shame and black mischance
May, in the scheme of things,
Await distracted staggering France,
God send her no such kings.

THE WOMAN OF BEARE

Adapted from Professor Kuno Meyer's literal version of an Irish poem, in his paper on "Stories and Songs from Irish MSS." contributed to *Otia Merseiana*.

*Ebbing, the wave of the sea
Leaves, where it wantoned before,
Wan and naked the shore,
Heavy the clotted weed:
And in my heart, woe is me!
Ebbs a wave of the sea.*

I am the Woman of Beare,
Foul am I that was fair:
Gold-embroidered smocks I had,
Now in rags am hardly clad.

Arms, now so poor and thin,
Staring bone and shrunken skin,
Once were lustrous, once caressed
Chiefs and warriors to their rest.

Not the sage's power, nor lone
Splendour of an aged throne,
Wealth I envy not, nor state :
Only women folk I hate.

On your heads, while I am cold,
Shines the sun of living gold ;
Flowers shall wreathe your necks in May ;
For me, every month is gray.

Yours the bloom : but ours the fire,
Even out of dead desire.
Wealth, not men, ye love ; but when
Life was in us, we loved men.

Fair the men, and wild the manes
Of their coursers on the plains ;
Wild the chariots rocked, when we
Raced by them for mastery.

Lone is Femen: vacant, bare,
Stands in Bregon Roman's Chair.
And the slow tooth of the sky
Frets the stones where my dead lie.

The wave of the great sea talks :
Through the forest winter walks.
Not to-day by wood and sea
Comes King Diarmuid here to me.

I know what my king does.
Through the shivering reeds, across
Fords no mortal strength may breast,
He rows—to how chill a rest!

Amen! Time ends all.
Every acorn has to fall.
Bright at feasts the candles were,
Dark is here the house of prayer.

I, that when the hour was mine,
Drank with kings the mead and wine,
Drink whey-water now, in rags
Praying among shrivelled hags.

Amen! Let my drink be whey—
Let me do God's will all day—
And, as upon God I call,
Turn my blood to angry gall.

Ebb, flood, and ebb: I know
Well the ebb, and well the flow,
And the second ebb, all three—
Have they not come home to me?

Came the flood that had for waves
Monarchs, mad to be my slaves,
Crested as by foam with bounds
Of wild steeds and leaping hounds.

Comes no more that flooding tide
To my silent dark fireside.
Guests are many in my hall,
But a hand has touched them all.

Well is with the isle that feels
How the ocean backward steals:
But to me my ebbing blood
Brings again no forward flood.

*Ebbing, the wave of the sea
Leaves, where it wantoned before,
Changed past knowing the shore,
Lean and lonely and gray;
And far and farther from me
Ebbs the wave of the sea,*

FROM CATULLUS

(CARMEN VIII)

POOR fool Catullus, cease to rave,
And give the dead a decent grave.
You had your day of shine and sun;
The sun is set, and that is done.
Bright was the sun, and life was sweet,
When to a mistress fared your feet.
She whom you loved, as none before,
As you shall love again no more.
'Twas then all pleasant sports were used,
And you were fain, nor she refused.
'Twas then you had your share of sun.
The sun is set and that is done.
Now she refuses. Never fret,
But let your mind like steel be set :

Pursue her not, nor live in pain;
But render for disdain disdain.
Lady, farewell: it is enough;
I'll come no more to court rebuff.
Farewell: Catullus steels his heart:
'Tis you, 'tis you, shall feel the smart!
Your prime of youth is on the wane,
And when will wooers come again?
Life shall be long and gray and dull,
And who will count you beautiful?
Who now with yours his name shall link?
Or by your side, love-weary, sink?
What lips from yours be loath to part?
—But, but, Catullus, steel thy heart.

FROM JUVENAL

"MORE worlds to conquer," Alexander cried.
He frets and sweats, pent in the narrow side
Of one cramped Universe. Let him go on,
And reach his destined end, at Babylon:
A coffin shall content him. Death alone
Your great man's littleness is bold to own.

FROM VICTOR HUGO

EACH to his fancy figures in his heart
Some fairy-world of poesy and art,
 Some Canaan from some Pisgah height descried.
Ah ! better for us, where we stand, to stay ;
For, from the granted to the promised land no way
 Leads, and 'twas well for Moses that he died.

COWSLIPS

*Cowslips, sweetlips, smelling of the summer,
Coming with the cuckoo, bringing in the May,
Lifting heads in pastures, where the cattle spare
you,
Waiting to be gathered when the children come
to play.*

Daffodils were golden, nodding in the uplands,
Golden in the marshes flares the marigold :
Softer hues the cowslips, winsomer and sweeter—
Sure the soul of flowers is the odour that they
hold.

Faint and soft and honied, fragrant as the kine's
breath,
Wafted airs of cowslips gladden London streets;

Yellow-speckled handfuls, pennyworths of sun-
shine,
To the dusty passers they are lavish of their
sweets.

Not from London barrows came our Irish cowslips,
Tossed and cramped and prisoned all the night
they've lain ;
But when morning reddened, lest they should
feel strangers,
Cowslips from each cutting kept a-nodding
to the train.

Kindly was the thought for children who this
Maytime
Weave no cowslip necklace, wind no cowslip
ball ;
London parks are gay with beds of guarded
blossom,
But, to pluck and treasure—not a daisy in
them all.

*Cowslips, sweetlips, smelling of the country,
Coming with the cuckoo, bringing in the May,
Straight and tall and slender, springing in the
pastures,
Waiting to be gathered when the children come
to play.*

LINES TO A WRITER OF FAIRY-
TALES

(TO MOIRA O'NEILL)

OH, chronicler of Elves and Bees,
Whose mutual old antipathies,
Whose leagues, whose loves, whose strifes you
tell
And battles in the foxglove bell:

I know there dwells in your command
Some sort of sprite from Fairyland,
Whose dainty laughter flutters up
Like butterfly from buttercup
Into the sun; who does not fear
The heavy-falling human tear;

Bred among flowers, it knows soft rain
Freshens and feeds, and does not stain ;
But where ill creatures leave their trace
It only knows to shun the place :

And I, constrained in dingy hive
With angry buzz the drones to drive,
Am of the bees ; yet wander too
And roam sometimes where fairies do ;
And at Queen Duty's fretful call
I work perforce, or not at all.

Then make it peace for you and me
'Twixt busy elf and idle bee.

DENNY

DENNY mine, I contemplate,
Half alarmed and half elate,
Half amused and half beguiled,
Such a decorative child :

It is true

There are plenty of the others,
You have sisters and you've brothers :
Some are pretty, some are not ;
But there is in all the lot

None like you.

And though, when some noisy fun
By the others is begun,
You can shout and jump and frisk,
As befits a cheerful, brisk

Little chap,

You are likest some rare pet,
Squirrel, lemur, marmoset,
That with soft and wavy fur
Would curl up and never stir
In my lap.

Prettier than a little girl's
Are your amber-coloured curls,—
Curls that cluster, somewhat slack,
“Gold upon a ground of black;”
And your eyes
Are as black as black can be,
—Eyes you never got from me:—
And I think that something queer
Must be surely lodging here
In disguise.

Most discreet is your delight;
And your tiny mouth, shut tight,

Never laughs, but at odd whiles

Dimples into quiet smiles

For a joke.

If I tied you, hands and feet,

Held you over burning peat,

Crying, "Fairies all we banish,"

Would you shrivel up and vanish

In the smoke?

Are your queer, uncanny ways,

And your serious, solemn plays

Signs of something old and small—

Not a little boy at all,

But an elf?

Or is all that fluffy hair,

All your fashions and that air

Prim, precise, demure, and quaint,

Like a little prince in paint,

Just yourself?

MY LADY NOWADAYS

(TO J. D.)

HEAR me, you clubs of Piccadilly,
Listen, you flats of Albert Gate,
I praise no saint, enshrine no lily;
I sing the Woman Up to Date.
(She must have money when she marries,
With dresses now and then from Paris.)

I do not mean the rash divider
Of skirts and households, nor the wife
Whose tolerance for herself is wider
Than for her husband's early life—
Creatures that ramp and rave and grovel
In every "modern" play and novel.

But one you'd trust to order dinner,
Or skate upon the thinnest ice :
No saint, I've said ; yet, if a sinner,
No more a sinner than is nice—
Dear Jenny, would it disconcert you
If I accused you of a virtue?

Is it a virtue to be witty?
I fear you have one. To be gay?
—But, if it's wicked to be pretty,
The devil makes it up that way.
In any case, my life upon it,
You'd blush to wear a " Christian " bonnet.

If you've a conscience, you can curb it,
And don't allow it to rampage :
Your neighbour's doings don't perturb it,
It does not fret about the stage.
If you like music-halls—I doubt it—
You go—but you don't brag about it.

“Gyp” you adore, whom some count shocking ;

Yet, for my part, than you I prize
No critic more, although your stocking
Is not the colour of your eyes.
(Girton, let not the saying rankle !
Blue never ribbed so neat an ankle.)

You’ve eaten of the tree of knowledge,
You look the world between the eyes,
And, though you’ve never been to college
You have the wisdom to be wise.
Ah ! in despite of church and chapel
There’s still no flavour like the apple.

What’s new will soon be old, dear Jenny :
Time tramples with relentless gait
On fads and faddists, ah how many !
But you’ll be always up to date.—
Virtue may pall, and so may passion,
But charm is never out of fashion.

DOLLY

(TO F. C. A.)

DEAR little Dolly, pink and white,
Plays with her kitten from morn to night:
Over and under the chairs it steals,
Wars with a handkerchief, runs with reels,
Purrs as she fondles its plummy hair—
Never was seen such a pretty pair.

Dear little Doll, you're a woman grown;
Listen and let your kitty alone.
What you are, how you come to be—
That is the point that puzzles me.

Hair, the colour of blossomed lime,
Matches blue eyes like rhyme and rhyme:
Pink little bud of a mouth is choice
For such a sweet little fluty voice.

These are appropriate, I'll allow—
Then, why should you own that classic? brow?
Delicate feet, for tripping toes—
But how do you come by a Roman nose?
That profile for a fay like you!
Had Lucretia a kitten too?

How shall I best express your sweetness?
How shall I render its incompleteness?
What comparison must I fetch?
Doll!—shall I say,—you are just a sketch?
Only a sketch. To spoil were crime.
Who shall finish it? Love? or Time?

Time, my dear, is a painter Dutch,
Owns a very laborious touch;
Very minute effects he tries,
With a deal of drawing about the eyes.
Not one touch of his work he'll slur,
And never misses the character.

But he works so slowly that all the bloom
Dies off a peach in his painting-room.

Love belongs to a different school,
Works regardless of any rule:
But let his critics say what they list,
Love is a grand impressionist:
Handles the sketch, and, hour by hour,
Glow the canvas with growing power,
Gains a meaning and light that's strange,
Flushes quicken and colours change—
The picture is finished within a day—
No sooner finished than given away.

Only, Dolly, when all is told,
The picture mounted (in black or gold),
When all are praising the flawless face,
The quaint precision of dainty grace,
Shall I wish—when wishing is all in vain—
To see the sweet little sketch again?

TO LALAGÉ DEPARTING

*Dulce ridentem Lalagen amabo,
Dulce loquentem.*

So, Lalagé, you're really starting ;
You've sprinkled with the tears of parting
 Your mother's breast.
And other—ah, that twinkle tells—
Would-be affectionate farewells
 Have been—repressed?

Cheer up, my Lalagé; to-day
The trip from London to Bombay
 Is just a ferry.
Not that upon the whole I fear
You'll droop and pine; indeed, my dear,
 Don't be too merry.

For too much laughing gives you wrinkles,
And many dread an eye that twinkles,
Who'd beard Afridis.

Your valiant captain's valour sinks
Before a maiden who, he thinks,
Laughs where no need is.

He'll be delighted if you poke
Fun at his neighbours; while you joke,
He fairly bellows.

But then he meditates: *Might she—
Might she—oh monstrous! laugh at Me
With other fellows?*

For, Lalagé, remember this,
Each man, although his value is
The barest zero,
Minds not so much his brother men,
But every cock to every hen
Would be a hero.

So curb your laughing eyes and tongue,
Especially where men are young,
 And when you've tried it,
If you are grateful to me after,
Though nearly choked with bubbling laughter,
 Write and confide it.

Shine on the stage with acclamation,
A twinkling star in every station,
 Sweep all before you.
Enliven amateurish dramas,
Till simple subs and grandest Lamas
 Simply adore you.

Sure such a sweet and dainty rogue,
With that alluring touch of brogue
 That wins the stranger,
To homesick youth in parched-up places,
Among the queer outlandish faces,
 Must prove a danger.

Of course, you're going not alone ;

But that too youthful chaperon

Won't watch you wisely.

So mind, wherever you may go,

Be just the Lalagé I know,

And you'll do nicely.

As for this broken-down professor,

Your far too lenient confessor,

Ah, you'll forget me ;

I say my say now while you pack,

Because I know when you come back,

He will not let me.

THE CONFESSION OF A CRITIC

(LINES WRITTEN IN AN ALBUM.)

DEAR Madam, in my critic-den
I dip a mercenary pen,
And scribble ceaselessly for pelf,
But once I wrote—to please myself,
Ah me! the novels that I planned,
The plays I wrote (they're still on hand);
Ah me! the hopes and fears that slipped
Into each futile manuscript!
Since then, I'm grown a man of letters
And sit in judgment on my betters,
Who hold to what *was* my intent,
Whose art is tragically meant,

Who pin their faith to far-off years,
Who stir to laughter and to tears,
Who sing the songs I'd fain have sung
In the good days—when I was young.
—Ah me, my verses! Yet one gains,
Perhaps, a virtue youth disdains,
And grows contented to acclaim
Those others rising into fame.
And, once or twice in a blue moon,
Some echo of the half-heard tune
Rings in my head; then for a day
I write—and do not write for pay.
And so, dear Madam—since you willed
That write I should—my page is filled.



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The queen's chronicler

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